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Names among the Tallensi of the Gold Coast

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African languages are still, for the most part, living languages in a unique sense. 000
They exist only in the activity of speech. Everyone who has lived with an African community that lacks the art of writing and has experienced the thrill of learning their language in the daily give-and-take of work and friendship, knows how fresh and spontaneous, one might almost say poetical, such a language seems. One is always being surprised by the discovery of some new aspect or implication of the most commonplace utterance. The contrast with European languages, weighed down as they are by the accumulated deposits of thirty centuries of literacy, can be startling. By endowing language with a separate existence in its own right, literacy can be a barrier between it and the general body of custom. I suppose that is why so much of the vocabulary of a European language is like a hoard of ancient coins, still circulating though defaced and debased in worth beyond recognition. For a primitive African society its language is the very essence of its total body of custom, its breath of life. That is why the language of an African people always seems so graphic and alive for it is daily and hourly nourished by the activities and thoughts, the feelings and beliefs of the people. It is in an African people's language that its culture is most faithfully and fully pictured. This, it seems to me, is the outstanding lesson which we owe to Professor WESTERMANN's deep and devoted scholarship in African languages, history and cultures. It is certainly the lesson his inspired teaching imparted to those who were able, as I fortunately was, to spend a little time with him before going out to the field. And there is one other lesson we owe in no small degree to his studies. It is that African languages are exceedingly rich and subtle.

Nowhere does this appear so vividly as in the proverbs, songs, stories, myths and legends of African peoples, their oral literature, as it has sometimes been called; and here Professor WESTERMANN is surely the arch-connoisseur. A minor element in this aspect of African culture is the theme of my essay.

How one addresses or refers to a person is a matter of great importance in all 121
societies. We know only too well what subtle distinctions lie in the nomenclature of reference and address we use in our own culture. We do not, for example, normally use a person's given name in speaking to or of him unless he is an intimate of ours in some degree. In most African societies the niceties of nomenclature are even more important. As is well known, the terminologies used to distinguish kinsfolk, persons of rank, holders of religious office, and such like, serve not only to designate these persons but also to determine conduct towards them. It must be noted, however, that what these designations do is to put individuals into categories and classes. The individuals themselves are, so to speak, hidden behind the

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121 mask of chief or priest, or even simply father, uncle, or spouse, for purposes of the situation and the relationship. Yet the individual himself, the common basis of the several offices and ranks and kinship statuses he may exercise, is not thus extinguished. His very existence as an individual, let alone his personality and idiosyncrasies, affects everything in which he plays a part and must therefore receive social recognition. That, no doubt, is the basic reason why every individual, in all human societies, has a name of his own, a given name or names — though not necessarily the same given name all his life. Names may change in accordance with stages in the life cycle as among the Andamanese, or as among some tribes of Sarawak on the birth of the first child and on the death of children[1]). At least, this is how these well known instances are usually represented. But we must be careful. For a teknonym or initiation name may have the function of classifying a person rather than of specifying him individually. It might just as well be called a title as a name. The point is that naming, as a means of identifying the unique individual, shades over into naming as a means of pointing out where and how the individual fits into society; and this is not surprising for the paradox of the individual is that he is unique simply by reason of the specific combination, in his life-space, of experiences in social relationships and situations shared by others and falling on him as a consequence of where he fits into society.

But in Africa names are not just a verbal notation for the different phases or aspects of a person's status and life history. They are symbols deeply charged with meaning derived from the whole culture. We know this also from other cultures both of the past and of contemporary ethnological interest. It has been reported of certain South American tribes that knowledge of a person's secret name may give the knower magical power over him[2]), and similar magical power through names is believed to be possible among many other peoples. Sir JAMES FRAZER explained taboos on names by the argument that savages regard their names as a vital part of themselves and therefore to be kept secret lest knowledge of the name give power over the person to some ill-wisher[3]). We remember how, in the Biblical story of the Creation, God brings His creatures to Adam for him to name them, so that their names are coeval with their beginnings, and throughout the Old Testament, as PEDERSEN shows, "the name is the very peculiarity and power of the soul"[4]).

This notion, though perhaps not quite so metaphysically formulated, would meet with understanding among many African peoples. When, in Ashanti, a man names his son after a beloved friend or after a renowned ancestor, he is tacitly hoping that his son may be like the friend or the ancestor in character and deeds,

[1]) The most valuable comparative survey of the subject of names and naming in ethnology is still that of THURNWALD, in MAX EBERTS *Reallexikon d. Vorgeschichte*, 1927, article s. v. Name, Namengebung. On the Sarawak (Kayan-Kenyah-Kelantan) customs referred to, see F. H. POLLARD and E. BANKS, "Teknonymy and other customs among Kayan, etc." in *Sarawak Museum Journal*, iv, pt. 4, no. 18, 1937. Similar customs are described among Australian aborigines in Dr. DONALD F. THOMSONS excellent paper on "Names and Naming in the Wik Mongkan Tribe", *J. Royal Anthrop. Inst.* LXXVI, pt. 2, 1946.

[2]) References are in THURNWALD, loc. cit.

[3]) See *The Golden Bough*, abridged edn. ch. 22.

[4]) JOHS. PEDERSEN, *Israel*, I—II, pp. 245. sqq.

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as if the name could have a character moulding, — a soul shaping, as he might put it, — effect. Such names, moreover, make up a living record of notable events or persons or achievements in the father's life.

It is in this sense, mainly because of what they symbolise and record, that names and naming customs can be said to be part of a people's oral literature. There is no better testimony to this than in one of Professor WESTERMANN's own linguistic explorations, the enchanting life story which he recorded of the Ewe Bonifatius Foli[5]). It will be remembered that the story opens with Foli's explanation of how he came by his name. Had he been born a commoner, he says, he would have been called Kofi, the day name for a male born on Friday. But he was of chiefly descent and so received the corresponding aristocratic name, a name which no commoner would normally bear.

The ethnographical and linguistic writings on Africa abound with examples pertinent to my theme, but I want to illustrate it from my own field work among the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast[6]). All Tallensi are curious and alert in the matter of personal names. Early in my stay among them I once asked a young man what was the point of name giving. This is what he answered: "(The reason) why they give names is that you may know so-and-so and the other one, and know what he looks like; for if they did not confer names on you they would not know you." The name stands for the individual, is part of what marks him out from others. This feeling about the individuality of a name is shown in the delight with which Tallensi meet someone bearing the same name as themselves. Two persons with the same name call each other "*n-ɣu'uri*", (my name-sake) and exchange friendly banter.

The Tallensi have a technical term for the giving of a name, *pit ɣu'uri*, to confer a name; and this term has a cognate which, we shall see, is very revealing, *pɔt ɣu'uri* to utter or announce a name. Let us consider, first, the giving of names. This is quite a complex matter. I realised this shortly after arriving among the Tallensi, on the occasion of Ma'an-ɔb's funeral. Just before any burial, an elder offers a red cock to the dead with an invocation that he may depart and join his ancestors. I was struck by the fact that the elder, in this case, addressed the dead man as Yin, not as Ma'an-ɔb; and this led to a train of enquiries.

I thus discovered that a person can have, and very commonly does have two given names. One is his *ɣu'ur-zoo*, his open or everyday name; the other is his *seyɛnsa ɣu'uri*, his spirit-guardian name. It is the latter name that is invoked at death and on other ritual occasions on which a person's well being is at issue. It is the name used, for instance, when a person's evil Pre-destiny is exorcised[7]). It is not a secret name. Though it is not usually known outside the circle of his close kin, those who normally share with him in sacrifices to common ancestors of

[5]) D. WESTERMANN, "Kindheitserinnerung des Togonegers Bonifatius Foli". *Mitt. d. Sem. f. Orient. Sprachen*, XXXIV, iii, 1931.

[6]) I have described much of the life and social organisation of the Tallensi in my two books *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (1945) and *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*, (1949).

[7]) For a fuller account of this notion and of the notion of the *seyɛ* see op. cit., *The Web of Kinship*, passim. See also R. S. RATTRAY, *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, vol. II. passim.

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his immediate household, it is willingly told to a *bona fide* enquirer. Nor is it a sacred name to be used, perhaps, only in religious contexts; for, as I have implied, the spirit-guardian name can, and often does serve also as the mundane name. It is, rather, a private name, symbolising a unique relationship of religious dependence and reciprocity between the ward and his ancestors. A person's *seyor* is the ancestor or ancestress (or sometimes group of ancestors) who keeps spiritual watch over the person's life, as the Tallensi put it. The *seyor* is an ancestor mystically located at a particular shrine whose status as an ancestor spirit is quite independent of his relationship with his namesake. Any ancestral shrine can be a *seyor* shrine to one or other descendant of the ancestor commemorated. As the guardian of the ward's life the *seyor* spirit has to receive sacrifices for and from the ward at certain crises, such as childbirth in the case of a woman, or whenever the spirit demands it; and, as follows logically, the *seyor* has to be informed and placated when the ward dies.

This is an over-simplified outline of what the notion of spirit-guardianship means to the Tallensi but it must suffice. What we are here interested in is how a person comes by his *seyoraan* name and what such a name is likely to be. My friend Sayəbazaa summed the matter up. Your *wu'ur-soo*, he said, is just "thought up" — *i tiih i poori*; but your *seyor* name is a "command from a shrine" — *bayor n-yel* — given through a diviner. In conformity with the strong patriarchal character of Tale social organisation it is the right and duty of the father (or of the patrilineal head of his family such as his father or someone in that position if he is still alive) to name his children. It is he — sometimes following a suggestion from a son or brother — who thinks up the everyday name; and it is he, as head of the house, who consults the diviner to find which of the ancestors demands a child as spiritual ward. This demand may come before the child is born, incidentally to a consultation on other matters; or, if the prospective father is anxious, for instance, as often happens with his wife's first born, it may come out in a consultation held some time before the baby is due, mainly in order to find out which ancestors to appeal to for help for the woman in her condition. With later children it may be left for days or even a week or two after the birth of the child. At all events, it is in this consultation that an ancestor (or ancestress) "declares himself" as the new babe's spirit-guardian. It is, on the face of it, not a voluntary choice by the infant's father but a behest which he cannot reject.

Anyhow, having ascertained his child's *seyor*, the father now returns home and makes a small offering to the shrine at which the ancestor has declared himself to reside in his role of spirit-guardian. The father may offer no more than a libation of flour stirred up in water (*zom-koom*) or he may offer a chicken as well. He prays that the ancestor may take good care of his new ward so that he may live long and prosper.

The child may henceforth be called by his *seyoraan* name; but if he also has an open name, he will be known by that. In fact he is in a transitional state, as regards his spirit-guardian. It is a tentative relationship, as yet. The Hill Talis[9]) show this by calling every infant, at this stage, SAMPANA, a term used in no other context

[9]) See *The Dynamics of Clanship* for details.

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and probably best translated as "Baby". Proper guardianship is later fixed by a special ritual of dedicating the child to its spirit-guardian with a larger sacrifice of a sheep or a goat or other animal of that standing, which takes place at the first head-shaving of the child, generally when it is two or three years old. By then the child may have a successor in birth order and he will have proved himself to be under good guardianship by virtue of his survival. 551 776

But our concern is with the names themselves. What sort of names are these private ones? Some are immediately obvious to anyone who knows the language and culture of the Tallensi. These are names of particular kinds of ancestor shrines which all men have, or owe homage to, through their family or lineage head. Thus, one of the commonest Tale names is YIN[9]) or some compound of this root. It is the root of the word NAAYIN, literally Chief-God, that is the heavenly god. But more pertinently for the subject of names, it is the name for the shrine and the associated ancestors, powers, and votive objects that together make up the cult focus of what is thought of as the individual's Destiny. The best fortune a Taləŋa can have is to have many children; and if he is lucky in this respect it is attributed to the benevolence of his YIN. Thus it happens that some of a man's children are almost always claimed as wards by his YIN ancestors; and a census soon shows that there are few families in which one or more children are not called by the name YIN or a compound of this word. Like all Tale names, it can be borne by both males and females, and is, of course, both the *sɛɣəraan* name and the open name. 551 777

Since having children is so often interpreted as a sign of the benevolence of a person's YIN, it is not surprising to find that often a number of a man's children are the wards of his YIN. If they are all under the guardianship of the YIN "as such" they may all bear the name YIN but with affixes that help to distinguish one child from another. The following is a list of some of the commonest YIN names. They are taken from a list of names found among the children and grandchildren of one old man. 551 776

YIN: YIN-DOOG (lit. male Yin); YIM-PƆK (lit. female Yin); YIM-BIL (lit. little Yin); YIN-ZIE (lit. red Yin — because the child was light skinned); YIN-TEE (lit. Yin's tree — referring to one of the votive objects on the shrine); YIN-TEEBIL (lit. little Yintee).

Similar devices are used with other names that may be repeated among several children and grandchildren of one family; for a man's children may be successively given as wards to other ancestor figures than the YIN. Thus another common name that is both a private name and an open name is BƆɣAR and its compounds. Children so named may be the wards of the distant lineage ancestors mystically assembled at the central shrine of the lineage, the *bɔɣar*[10]), as it is called. But they are also so named because they are the spiritual wards of one of the Hill Talis "external"

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[9]) Cognate forms, in other dialects, are WUN, WENDE. I have given some account of the YIN concept in my previously mentioned books. YIN is also the name given to the first-born of a pair of twins, "because he is the first to see the heavens above". The second-born is called ZUUR, tail, "because he comes behind the first".

[10]) This is the supreme ancestral shrine of a clan or a lineage. See op. cit. *Dynamics of Clanship* for details.

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bɔγar centres. This happens when a woman is taken to the "external" *bɔγar* because she has no child, in order to supplicate for offspring. When, later, she bears a child, this child is dedicated to the *bɔγar* as a ward. The name shows this. In addition, however, each of the Talis "external" *bɔγar* centres has its own set of names for its wards. These names are used in exactly the same way as the general name BƆγAR. Both this general name and the particular names are modifiable in the same way as YIN is to distinguish several wards of the same shrine in one family or lineage. So we find the names BƆγA-BIL, BƆγA-ZIE, etc.; or to take a particular name, TƆŋ, TAN-DOOG, TƆŋ-PƆK, TAN-ZOO, etc. which are given to children who are wards of the Bunkyiug "external" *bɔγar*.

This procedure is followed for children who come under the spiritual tutelage of any shrine. For example, KOLOGO is the name given to a child who is the ward of a divining (*bakologo*) shrine and TƆBƆGA is the name for a child whose spirit guardian is an ancestor connected with a magical medicine often owned by senior elders; and there are many others. But this mode of naming does not account for all persons who are wards of *yin* or *bɔγar* or other shrines. Thus, in addition to the YINS, there were, among TINTA'ALƆM's children and sons' children, MƆRBU and MƆRBIL, BANTAŋ and BANTAMBILL, and all of these were the wards of the same *yin* shrine as the YINS.

The reason for this is typical. The most important ancestor spirit associated with TINTA'ALƆM's Destiny (*yin*) shrine was that of his own father MƆRBU. While some of the children were the wards of the *yin* "as such", the two MƆRBUs were specifically claimed as wards by their dead grandfather "sitting at" TINTA'ALƆM's *yin* as the Tallensi state it. They were his particular wards, but under his spiritual oversight through the medium of the *yin*. So they were given his name. Thus many people who have names other than YIN are the wards of ancestors associated with *yin* shrines and their names may be both private and open. The interesting point here is that the name thus given is that of an ancestor who received it not as a private name but as a *wu'ur-zoo*. The original MƆRBU's *seyɔraan* name was YIDAAN; but when he in turn became an ancestor it was his open name that was commemorated. This is the common practice, and the reason is obvious. Like the equivalent in European languages, the Tale word *wu'uri* means both "appellation" and "repute" or "renown". Now a person's repute is not a private matter. It is the public esteem in which he is held. He is remembered by his descendants — invariably with pride, whatever his true character might have been — by the public name he was known by. So we have the apparent paradox that it is the private name that carries some element of ritual value but when a person achieves the high status of an ancestor spirit he is commemorated in the shrines dedicated to him and in the names given to his descendants by his open — in this context perhaps we might say his profane — — name. Neighbours, friends and acquaintances of TINTA'ALƆM's family, hearing one of the children addressed as MƆRBU, at once recollect who is being commemorated. They would not associate the name YIDAAN with the man who was known to them and their fathers as MƆRBU.

Again, what applies to a Yin holds for other groupings of ancestors linked to specific ritual vehicles. A person whose spirit guardian is a *bɔγar* or a *bakologo* may be claimed by one of the group of ancestors to whom the shrine is dedicated and

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may be given his name; and the same rule applies to all cult groupings of ancestors, for example at *ga'an*, at *tɔbəga*, at *nɔya-dok* and other shrines. 551 553

What about BANTAŋ and BANTAMBIL? This name literally translated means crocodile. It is one of very many animal names given to people and these again are part of the larger class of names taken from natural objects in general. Other names that fall into this class are NAAHO, cow or bull, BAA, dog, WAAFO, snake. They are very common either in their root forms or in the usual derivative forms. So are names like KURUG, iron, KUGƏR, stone, TEE, tree, and their compounds. There is nothing totemistic about such names. How they arise can best be made clear by an example. When TINTA'ALƏM was a youth he went on a communal fishing expedition and had the good fortune to catch a young crocodile. This is regarded as both a feat of skill and a sign of great good fortune. Not only is it difficult to catch crocodiles on these battues but it often happens that anybody who tries to catch one he has sighted gets bitten, and the consequences may be very serious. Men have lost limbs thus and some have even died as a result of such bites. So when TINTA'ALƏM got home his father at once took him off to consult a diviner. It emerged that the episode with the crocodile was a manifestation of TINTA'ALƏM's *yin*, specifically of his grandfather's wish to be recognised as one of his *yin* ancestors; and in due course, after the necessary rites had been done, the skull of the animal was placed on the *yin* shrine to commemorate and symbolise the event. The spirit of the crocodile caught on this expedition thus becomes one of the votive elements of the *yin*, and if the ancestor associated with the occasion claims a child as a ward it will be given the name BANTAŋ. 776

This is the standard pattern of belief and observance when a votive element is part of an ancestor shrine. Thus, to continue with TINTA'ALƏM's Yin, among its votive objects are a much worn hoe blade and the skull of a cow. The explanation is that TINTA'ALƏM was a hard working farmer. He prospered and was able, by occasional sales of surplus grain, gradually to acquire some livestock. In middle age his *yin* ancestors demanded a cow from him as a thank-offering — symbolically, the first cow he was able to acquire as the fruits of his good fortune. After the sacrifice, the cow's skull was placed on the *yin* shrine. But long before that, when TINTA'ALƏM had saved enough only to buy his first sheep, his *yin* had directed him to dedicate to it his hoe, the implement with which the good farmer gains his living. When his first hoe, the hoe he had bought for himself to cultivate his own land, wore out he placed it on his *yin* shrine in dedication. 551 776 778

What happens in the case of a child of this family whose private name is NAAHO, cow, or KUUR, hoe, or KURUG, iron, is that one (or more) of the ancestors who have manifested themselves as watching over TINTA'ALƏM's Destiny — that is, as his *yin* — on demanding this child as a ward has declared the cow or the hoe have been his special vehicle. Sacrifices offered on behalf of the ward will be given to all the ancestors manifested in the *yin*, but the cow or the hoe blade will be particularly cited. 553 776 778

Similar ideas and beliefs are associated with other ritual vehicles of the ancestors. Thus one KURUG I knew was the spiritual ward of a divining (*bakologo*) shrine. His father had fallen ill shortly after shooting a python and this proved to be the manifestation of a matrilateral ancestor demanding recognition. Both the arrow

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553 776 778 head and the python skull were placed on the shrine that was eventually consecrated to the *bakologo* spirit and my informant's name was a reference to the arrow head. One of *his* sons taken in guardianship by the same shrine was named WAAFO, snake.

[775] This case is interesting from another angle, too. The Tallensi have no belief in reincarnation. There is no special bond between a person and his ancestral namesake. He is not supposed to resemble or expected to emulate his ancestor. His name is a display of pride in ancestry, on the one hand, and a sign of submission to the religious supremacy of the ancestors, on the other. Thus he has no special ritual observances, on account of his name, if he is the ward of a patrilineal ancestor. [614] But if his *seyor* is a matrilateral ancestor, this person might have belonged to a clan different from his own. In that case he is often obliged to keep the totemic taboos of the clan of this ancestor. Thus in the above case it is not altogether an accident that the slain python turned out to be a manifestation of a matrilateral ancestor whose clan have a taboo against killing and eating this animal. Children taken in spirit-guardianship by this ancestor have therefore to observe the same taboo, whether or not it is followed by other members of their family and clan.

553 776 I do not want to follow further the complex ramifications of this aspect of Tale naming customs. One more detail must suffice. The greatest renown, that is the most respected *wu'uri*, comes from election to an office. A chief (*Na'ab*) or Custodian of the Earth (*Tendaana*) is always addressed and referred to by his title. After his death he is certain to have descendants through his sons, grandsons, and daughters, placed under his spiritual guardianship. They will be named either by the name he took to himself on election to his office, which I shall describe presently, or by his title. NA'AB, NA'ABPOK, TENDAANA, etc. are common names among descendants of such dignitaries.

And here it is pertinent to add that certain forms of disgrace which are associated with ritual danger result in the suppression of ancestral names. Thus if a man dies of smallpox, or is killed in war, his name is never given to a descendant. He will be remembered in sacrifices if he has descendants but not in their names.

551 553 I want to turn now to the open names. Their variety is extraordinary. A few refer to accidental or conventional circumstances connected with the birth of the bearer and are therefore fairly frequent. ZIBA, knows not father, is the name always given to a posthumous child. SAMANE, the home farm, is a common name. It is given to a child whose mother was overcome by labour pains while engaged on some task on the home farm. SUOR, path, has the same origin. TAMPOYAR, the garbage heap, may be the name given to a child born after the onset of labour pains at the ash heap. But it also arises in this way. A woman has had several children all of whom have died soon after birth. This is failure or malevolence on the part of the various ancestors who claimed these children as wards. When her next child is born the father says: "I give this child's life to be watched over by the garbage heap. My ancestors have failed me, for all that my children are good for is to be buried (as babies that die are so buried) in the garbage heap." This is a well tried magical idea, found also elsewhere in West Africa and in many other parts of the world.

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But the majority of open names refer to personal, local, family, historical and such like circumstances at the time of the person's birth. Sometimes a proverb or maxim is aptly turned into a name to suit the event. More usually the father or grandfather invents the name and the allusion may be so personal and obscure that only the family members see it. It is among these names that one finds what corresponds to the literary imagination of the Tallensi wisely, wittily, and often movingly expressed.

So luxuriant is the variety of these names that it is possible to quote only a few from amongst the many hundreds in my notebooks. A rare name is GƆMNA. It was borne by the son of a chief's headman. He was born on what was, for the chief and his headmen, a red-letter occasion that came around only once in two or three years, the day on which the Governor paid a visit to the area. So he was named GƆMNA, the Tale corruption of "Governor". By contrast, take such a name as NƆŋDEM-ZUOYA, literally, poor people abound. This is a proverbial saying used to console someone for a loss, particularly of livestock — as by disease — or other property. The father, in this case, had just suffered such a loss. A similar name is WU'UR-BEMI, literally, the name or renown remains. When the child was born, the father said he and his brothers were poor and insignificant people. But they had their renown as the descendants of chiefs and as men of good character. Their day would come, he said to himself, quoting the proverbial saying that whatever else might be lacking "the name remains". NA'AB-DIYA, the chief has taken office, was born immediately after his grandfather's election as chief and his name commemorates this event. As he explained to me: "I was born when Kunduzoor had just got his chiefship. He said: *'Na'ab diya*, the chief has taken office. If he is a good chief, he stays in office; if he is a bad chief, he stays in office. Nobody can now deprive him of the chiefship.' " This name, therefore, sums up one of the essential laws of Tale chiefship, the law of the inviolability of chiefship. Once installed a chief cannot be unseated. Na'abdiya had a son called SUH-PUDUMƆRA, the heart does not ache. The death of a child had greatly distressed him; but the birth soon afterwards of this son came as a consolation; hence the name.

A very respectable elder had a son of about 25 who bore the name BA-DI-DATA, let them not pull (my ear). When I asked for an explanation there was a burst of hilarity. The youth's father, grinning reminiscently, told the following story. As a young man, being the son of a chief he was a gay spark. Though already married he had an affair with the young wife of a senior chief. At that time the Administration took a serious view of adultery and treated it as a crime. So our friend found himself summoned to answer the charge of adultery and before the very chief whom he had wronged. The penalty was a heavy fine. Now a euphemistic way of talking about a court fine is to call it "tugging" or "twisting the ear" — *daŋg tɔbɔr*, an allusion to a practice sometimes resorted to by irate parents in correcting young children. As it happened, the culprit's wife had just born a son. The fine was announced in court but the wronged chief declared that it was not heavy enough, and demanded that it be increased by a sheep and a pot of beer. At this the culprit protested and begged "let them not twist my ear further". This episode is commemorated in the son's name.

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551 It is entertaining to run through a list of Tale open names if one knows the allusions contained in them. Let me quote a few that are derived from proverbs and are known to everybody, though, of course, only the parents and very close kin of the person know what the exact circumstances were that made the saying apposite.

551 The name YAM-PU-YIIT is the first phrase of the proverb "*Yam pu yiit yeŋha, ka be la pooni*". The concept *yam* has a wide ambit of meaning. It means wisdom,
538 prudence, commonsense, intelligence, etc. Here it can be translated "counsel" in the sense we give to this word when we speak of "keeping one's own counsel". The proverb can be rendered "Counsel (i. e. judgments about persons and events) does not come out on the surface; it remains in the heart". In other words, a prudent person keeps his own counsel. The man who gave his daughter this name was feeling aggrieved over the intrigues of a rival, but prudence dictated doing nothing other than obliquely giving out his feelings in the naming of his child. The sentiment is very characteristic of Tale values. Tallensi are anything but submissive in the face of rivalry or scorn; but to be carried away by resentment and to act rashly are thought to be foolish, in such circumstances.

"*Nigəm n-di*" is another characteristic Tale proverb that I came across in a name. It is a good example of the puritan streak in Tale values. It means, more or less literally, "persevere and (you will have enough) to eat", perseverance here carrying the implication of hard work and frugality. It was the name given to his son by a man who was proud of having begun life as a very poor man but of having prospered by hard work and frugality.

A saying reminiscent of our maxim that hard words do not break bones is "*yel pu kura*", literally: "a telling (off) doesn't kill". I knew a youth called YEL-PU-KURA, but did not ascertain why he was so called.

A final example is the name ZAŋ, to seize, take, grasp. This monosyllabic name was the abbreviation of a proverb "*Salənsaa yie, gum zaŋ pu tə*", that is, "The ant says, gather together and take hold of it, that is not hard". In other words, a task that is too hard for the individual to accomplish if he is alone can be done with the co-operation of many. This is an exhortation for kin and friends to help one another.

551 And now a few more instances of names that document events in family history and incidents of a personal nature.

DIM-BƆRƏGYA, enmity has vanished, commemorates a reconciliation between the child's father and his father-in-law.

BA-KYEL-MARIB, let them stop being responsible for me, was the name Saandi gave to his first born daughter after he left his father's brother and started to farm for himself.

YAAN-BƆRƏGYA, honour has departed, was the name given to a man after the tendaanaship which his father had held passed, on the latter's death, to another branch of the lineage.

SABAALUG, iron peg, DOK, pot, BAYANA, a species of tree, are names that refer to different kinds of medicine shrines acquired by the fathers at the time the children were born.

10: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1955 FE11 Tallensi FE11

As to the following, their meanings are known but the context of circumstances can only be guessed. 551

N-Nye-Fara, I have seen sorrow; ɔn-Ti-Wari, who gives something for nothing! Saya-Ti-Ba, submit to them; ɔn-Die-Sɔ, he who accepts (humbly) is better; Zi-Kihib, men who know no taboos; Ku-ŋaaŋ-Ba, will not overwhelm them; Ba-Eŋ-Ka-Mi, let them do it and find out.

As I have already noted, the same names are used for both males and females, occasionally with a suffix to indicate the sex of the person. But there is one respect in which women's names differ from men's. When they marry they are known in their husband's home only by a nominal form of the name of their natal settlement or clan, never by their given name. The given name is used only when they are at home among their own family and clan. This is one of the ways in which the strict separation of a woman's role in life as wife and mother, on the one hand, and as daughter and sister, on the other, is symbolised. I have described these ideas more fully in *The Dynamics of Clanship*, CH. IX, and in *The Web of Kinship*, CH. IV, and therefore say no more about them here.

One more topic must be briefly discussed. The naming customs I have described all belong to what Tallensi call "conferring names" — *pit wu'uri*. It is clear that names so given do serve very precisely to distinguish individuals. What about the other naming process, the uttering or announcing of names — *poi wu'uri*? 553

This takes place whenever a man is elected to a politico-ritual office as a chief (*na'ab*) among Namoo clans or as a tendaana or *boyar* officiant among the Talis[11]). The installation ceremonies include a short period of seclusion in a room where the clan and Earth shrines are housed. Then, following the common pattern of such *rites de passage*, the new chief or priest announces the names by which he wishes to be henceforth known. He has put aside his former social personality and the new one he assumes must be symbolised by an appropriate name. From his chamber of seclusion he announces his new names through the elder whose traditional duty it is to proclaim them. As a rule, three names are proclaimed, and as the last is given out the people assembled for the ceremonies shout in acclamation. The new chief or priest then comes out himself. Hereafter it is a taboo for his given name to be mentioned and he goes down to posterity by his new name, or rather by that one of them for which he shows most preference. I might add that it is impressive to see what a profound change a man seems to undergo when he is elected to a politico-ritual office. It is the supreme honour to which a man and all his kin can aspire, the greatest renown that can come to a name. Yet it is also a heavy burden. The new name stands for constant watchfulness and responsibility. Among the Tallensi, these duties are largely expressed in religious concepts and observances, though they are related to vital necessities such as the regularity of rainfall, peace and the absence of disease. To ensure this, chiefs and tendaanas have to keep ritual taboos, make sacrifices to the ancestors, arbitrate honestly in disputes, in short, watch over the welfare of the land and the people. The new names stand for this. 553 622 793

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[11]) See *The Dynamics of Clanship*, passim, for details.

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The Tallensi call these accession names *na'am wu'uri*, chiefship name, or *tendaan wu'uri*, tendaana name, or more generally *naam-wu'uri*, a term colloquially used for what we call nick-names, but meaning the name by which a person is publicly acclaimed. Accession names are, of course, "thought up" by the office-holder elect and so resemble the ordinary open names, which indeed they parallel in function. But they are interesting because they reflect not only the circumstances of the individual's achieving the honour of office, but his ideas about himself, his political role, and his historical position. In the legendary history of Tale clans the names of leaders often sum up the significance of the clan in the total social organisation. Thus an early Gbizug Tendaana is said to have been named GERIBAZAA, to mix all together, a name that well represents the present social and ritual functions of this tendaana as the intermediary between the Namoos and the Talis[12]).

A few examples only are needed to illustrate what I have said. I take, first, some well known chiefs' accession names.

One of the famous chiefs of Tongo was NAMBƆγADA, still crawling. This name was taken by a young chief who announced that he was, as yet, but an infant in chiefship, "still a crawler", but would soon grow up as a chief and do great things. A more recent chief called himself DEŋ-TIES, short for *Dɛŋ-ties-kunkɔŋ-na'am*, first to think of what to do will not lack a chiefship. He had acted quickly to seek election, before anybody else had thought of it, and implied that this was a promise of how he would act in the future. KU-NDU-ZOOR, cannot climb a hill, was the proud name taken by a chief whom I have previously mentioned. The reference was to the fact that water cannot run up-hill. Had he not excelled his competitors he would have been like water, unable to rise superior to the rest. Alas, his short chiefship was saddened by famine and his successor took to himself the name of NA-LEB-SEUG, it will turn to the rainy season. However long and hard a dry season may seem, he declared, it must give way to the rains at length. Coming after a famine — a long dry season, as it were — he proclaimed himself as the bringer of rain and so of food. The list can be extended but I will give only one more example. The Chief of Tongo, when I was there in 1935—37, had the given name of KPA'AMA, and this is how he is named, in breach of native ideas of propriety, in some Administrative records of the time[13]). His chiefly name was NA-NAAM-BIUŋ, will change into a lake. This is short for *Bul-ɔŋ-na-naam-biuŋ*, a good spring (rising in a small pool) will change into a lake. He meant that he was as yet only a small pool, an inexperienced and young chief, but given time to grow he would change into a lake, a great and beneficent chief — — beneficent, because water, being scarce in Taleland, is thought of as a very valuable thing.

The accession names of tendaanas and other holders of priestly offices follow the same pattern. One tendaana I saw installed proclaimed his new name as DOγ-BAZAA, begetter of all. He wished everybody to know that he regarded himself in his new role as the father of all his people, watching over their welfare as a father watches over that of his children.

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[12]) See my previously cited books for details of this division.

[13]) Cf. also RATTRAY, op. cit. vol. II, ch. 33.

10: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1955 FE11 Tallensi FE11

Another tendaana called himself NA-DEŋ-BUGƆLUG, will drop manure. He was comparing himself to a herd of cattle whose coming would bring fertility to the impoverished soil of his clan and so give them more food and well-being. A well known tendaana of former days was called MAAL-BAZAA, he who puts everything right by the proper religious acts.

Naming customs of the kind I have described are found among all the tribes and peoples of Africa. They show with particular clarity, just because the data seem so simple, how fundamental a really good knowledge of a people's language is for a proper understanding of their culture. How deep can the understanding of the culture be if the ethnographer who is studying it does not immediately understand the meaning of the names of the people he is in daily contact with? It can be seen, also, that a name is a document epitomising personal experiences, historical happenings, attitudes to life, and cultural ideas and values.